

# Memoir Terms Kennedy Role in Diem Coup a Blunder

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Lyndon B. Johnson says in his White House memoirs that the Kennedy Administration's role in the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem was "a serious blunder" that caused political chaos in South Vietnam and became a principal factor in Mr. Johnson's subsequent commitment of ground combat forces there.

Mr. Johnson contends that his expansion of the war in Vietnam grew directly out of the

coup d'etat against the South Vietnamese leader three weeks before Mr. Johnson assumed the Presidency on Nov. 22, 1963.

Excerpts from the wide-ranging memoirs of the foreign and domestic crises confronted by Mr. Johnson are being published in The New York Times in a series beginning today. Under the title "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969," they will appear on Nov. 7 in a 636-page book under the imprint of Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

The former President, who is 63 years old, also says that he was not caught by surprise by the enemy's Lunar New Year offensive in February, 1968, and that the fighting then resulted in a major defeat for the Communists and not an American Dienbienphu, as a number of observers have viewed it.

He saw the offensive coming, Mr. Johnson says, and he knew he would have to meet and crush it before Hanoi would enter peace negotiations.

The Vietnamese Communists were able to turn their defeat into a psychological victory, Mr. Johnson maintains, only because opponents of the war in Congress and the news media played the role of enemy dupes by disseminating unwarranted gloom to the American people.

Then, after the Paris negotiations had begun, he writes, supporters of Richard M. Nixon's candidacy, apparently without the future President's knowledge, almost caused the talks to break off by persuading the leaders in Saigon not to go along with Mr. Johnson's halt in the bombing of North Viet-

nam on Oct. 31, 1968. Mr. Johnson also blames this intrigue in part for the failure to achieve substantive progress in the negotiations during the last three months of his Presidency.

He does not name the Nixon supporters, but previously published reports have said he believes that Mrs. Anna Chennault, the Chinese-born widow of Lieut. Gen. Claire L. Chennault, the World War II Flying Tiger leader, was among them. Mrs. Chennault has denied the allegation.

Mr. Johnson takes credit for organizing and implementing the so-called Vietnamization strategy—the progressive substitution of a strong Saigon administration and army for American combat forces—that Mr. Nixon has been following since he took office.

According to Mr. Johnson, he left Mr. Nixon with a strong political and military situation in South Vietnam and ongoing negotiations in Paris that can be combined to achieve a successful outcome.

"I felt I was turning over to President Nixon a foreign policy problem that, although serious, was improving; an ally that was stronger than ever before; an enemy weakened and beaten in every major engagement; and a working forum for peace," Mr. Johnson writes. "These we had achieved through the months and years of pain and sacrifice. But we had accomplished even more than that. We had kept our word to Southeast Asia. We had opposed and defeated aggression, as we promised we would. We had given 17 million South Vietnamese a chance to build their own country and their own institutions. And we had seen them move well down that road."

## Relations With Kennedys

Highlights of Mr. Johnson's memoirs on other subjects include the following:

His relations with John F. Kennedy and with his wife, now Mrs. Aristotle S. Onassis, were easy and affectionate. But Mr. Johnson says that he and Robert F. Kennedy were not on close terms and he indicates that Robert Kennedy tried to prevent his selection for the Vice Presidency in 1960.

He had decided not to seek the Presidency on his own in 1964 and was persuaded to do so, principally by Mrs. Johnson, on the afternoon of Aug. 25, 1964, the day after the Democratic convention opened in Atlantic City.

He is convinced that he prevented take-over in the Dominican Republic in the spring of 1965.

He says the plans for "United States military intervention" to abort Communist insurrections in Central America and the Caribbean were laid by President Kennedy in 1963 and that preparatory military exercises were conducted.

Israel launched her surprise attack against Egypt during the six-day Middle East war in 1967 despite a promise to Mr. Johnson that she would give him "a week or two" to open the Gulf of Aqaba and obtain a peaceful settlement.

Mr. Johnson faced down the Soviet Union on June 10, 1967, by sending the Sixth Fleet to within 50 miles of the Syrian coast when Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin, on the hot line, threatened Soviet military intervention as Israel was consolidating her victory with a last quick day of fighting for the Golan Heights.

The retired President blames George Romney, then Governor of Michigan and now Secretary of Housing and Urban Development in the Nixon Administration, for the delay in the dispatch of Federal troops to Detroit during the riots in July, 1967, that cost 43 lives.

A White House announcement that Mr. Johnson would visit the Soviet Union in October, 1968, was scheduled to be made on Aug. 21 of that year, the day after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. The invitation, received the day before, was not made public.

Former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey's dovish speech at Salt Lake City, Utah, on Sept. 30, 1968, cost Mr. Humphrey the Presidency, Mr. Johnson believes. The speech disturbed the leaders in Saigon, Mr. Johnson writes, made them more receptive to the intrigue by Mr. Nixon's supporters and delayed the bombing halt and progress in the Paris talks that would have won Mr. Humphrey the margin of victory.

## Successful Domestic Efforts

Dwelling with pride on his domestic accomplishments, Mr. Johnson recounts with feeling the successful battles to secure Congressional passage of his Great Society programs—the Job Corps, the bills to provide housing for the poor and to rid them of such evils as the hordes of rats that infest slum tenements, the advances in education and health, and most of all, civil rights.

He tells of his own confrontation with his conscience to overcome his Southern heritage. "Nothing makes a man come to his conscience than the Presidency," he writes. "When I sat in the

Oval Office after President Kennedy died and reflected on civil rights, there was no question in my mind as to what I would do. I knew that, as President and as a man, I would use every ounce of strength I possessed to gain justice for the black American."

Mr. Johnson recalls the passion with which he fought the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. He writes of his triumph on the night of March 15, 1965, a week after Sheriff Jim Clark and his Alabama troopers had halted Martin Luther King's march from Montgomery into Selma with billy clubs and bullwhips. That night Mr. Johnson transfixed a joint session of Congress with a speech that won the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

"For a few seconds the entire chamber was quiet," he writes, as he said his final words: "And . . . we . . . shall overcome."

"Then the applause started and kept coming. One by one the Representatives and Senators stood up. They were joined by the Cabinet, the justices and the ambassadors. Soon most of the chamber was on its feet with a shouting ovation that I shall never forget as long as I live."

## A Number of Drafts

The memoirs, which went through a number of drafts, were researched and written in what amounted to a collaboration between Mr. Johnson and a team of men, now his associates in Texas, who were in the White House during his Administration. A major role is understood to have been played by Walt W. Rostow, formerly Mr. Johnson's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs and now at the University of Texas.

The others were William J. Jorden, a former foreign corres-

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